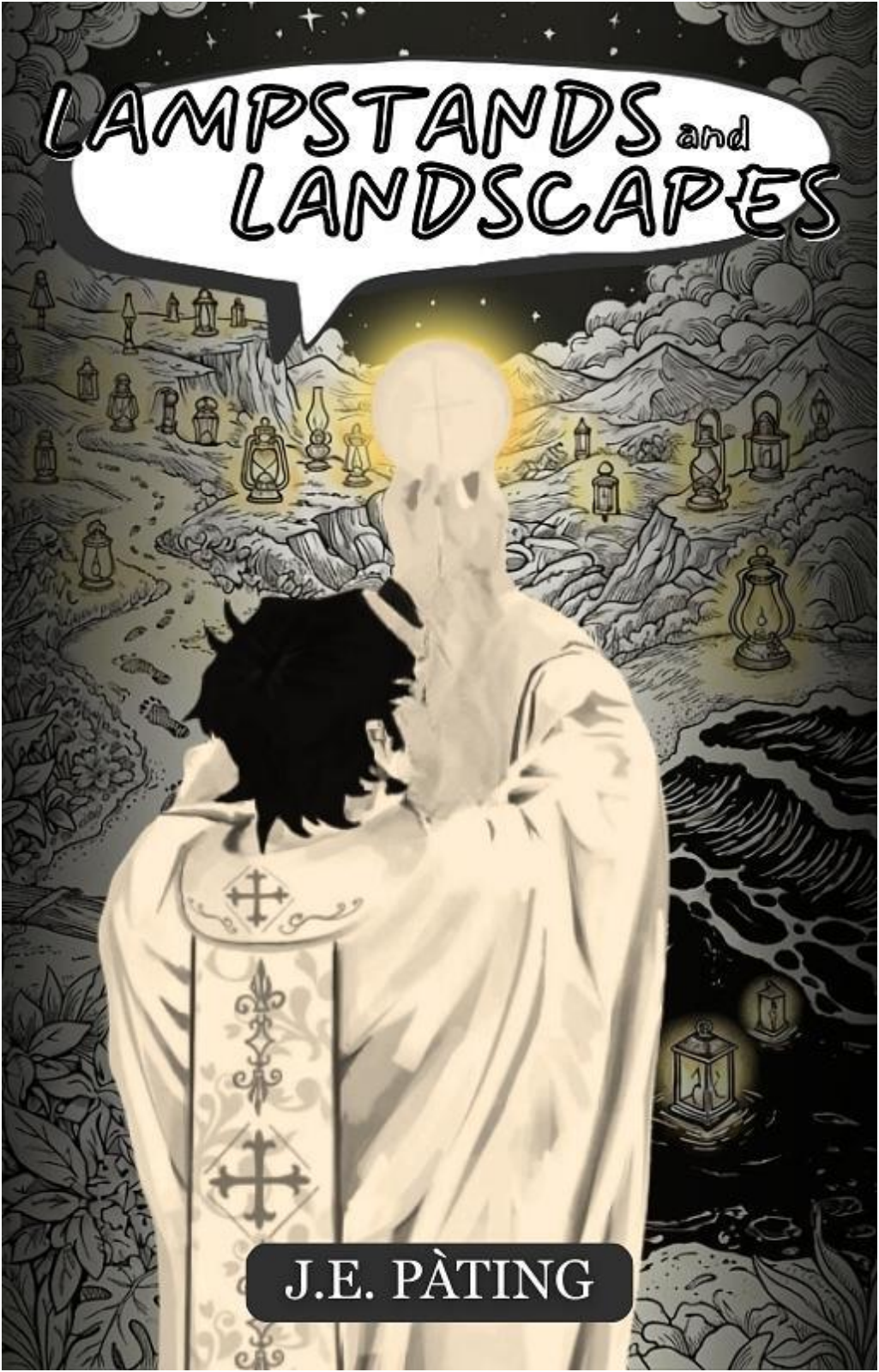
LAMPSTANDS and LANDSCAPES
J.E. PÀTING

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Lampstands and Landscapes

Do bible readings have connections to the chaos of today's headlines?

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First edition

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For God, the Lampstand;
For Tarlac City, the Landscape.

Pietas et Litterae

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Preface

Every day, events unfold around us—storms that test our resilience, celebrations that unite communities, tragedies that awaken our conscience, and simple moments that remind us of our shared humanity. These experiences often appear briefly in the news, yet their meaning goes far beyond the headlines. Behind every story are people whose lives are deeply affected.

Lampstands and Landscapes was written as a collection of reflections that connect real events with the wisdom of Scripture. Each chapter places the light of faith upon the landscapes of contemporary life, inviting readers to see familiar situations through a deeper moral and spiritual lens.

The title draws inspiration from the Gospel image of a lamp placed on a stand so that its light may shine for all. In the same way, the reflections in this book seek to illuminate the realities of our world—encouraging awareness, compassion, and responsibility in how we respond to the events that shape our communities.

This book does not claim to provide all the answers. Rather, it invites readers to pause, reflect, and recognize that faith continues to speak even in the ordinary and challenging moments of everyday life.

One

WE, THE MANY AFFECTED

Wisdom 1:1-7 (Monday, November 10, 2025)

Last week, Super Typhoon Uwan made landfall in the Philippines, prompting the evacuation of over a million people across Luzon, including my hometown, Tarlac. The storm arrived with intense winds, heavy rainfall, and widespread flooding that submerged roads, damaged homes, and disrupted the daily lives of thousands of families. Several local government units, anticipating the severity of the typhoon, suspended classes and government work as a precautionary measure to protect residents. These proactive decisions showed a sincere effort to put human safety first, especially in a province like Tarlac that often becomes a catch basin for rainwater coming from surrounding areas—many dams overflowed, prompting the opening of them. Despite these preparations, the storm still caused fatalities and forced countless individuals into evacuation centers, highlighting how even strong preventive efforts cannot fully shield vulnerable communities from the harsh reality of natural disasters. The news coverage throughout the week emphasized the resilience of affected communities—how neighbors helped one another, how volunteers mobilized relief drives, and how ordinary people showed extraordinary compassion. At the same time, it raised important questions about whether the government's long-term disaster response systems are truly adequate in facing the regular cycle of strong typhoons the country experiences.

Image of Tarlac Cathedral, Tarlac City with the LOVE THE PHILIPPINES branding.

Reading these events through the lens of Scripture offers us insights. The first reading from Wisdom on Monday, November 10, 2025 emphasizes the pursuit of justice and integrity: *"Love righteousness, you rulers of the earth, think of the Lord with sincerity of heart."* This passage serves as a moral reminder that leadership, especially during crisis, must be anchored in sincerity, honesty, and moral responsibility. It invites reflection not only from national officials but also from local leaders and ordinary citizens who play roles in disaster readiness and response. In the context of Typhoon Uwan, this reading challenges society to look at how justice is practiced when it comes to protecting lives and ensuring safety. Preemptive class suspensions in Tarlac, for example, reflect prudence and genuine concern for human life, aligning with the kind of righteousness described in the reading. However, the repeated devastation from typhoons suggests that much deeper, long-term planning is needed. Issues such as inadequate drainage systems, slow infrastructure development, and questions surrounding the efficiency of flood control projects surface every time a strong storm hits. These concerns reveal the need for integrity not only during the typhoon itself but before it—through transparent planning, responsible use of public funds, and consistent implementation of disaster-prevention programs.

In conclusion, integrating the news of Typhoon Uwan with the wisdom of Scripture highlights the shared responsibilities of both leaders and citizens. The readings encourage us to act with integrity, uphold justice, and embrace accountability—not just when disaster strikes, but in every decision and action that affects the common good. They also call us to cultivate a kind of faith that inspires resilience and hope, especially during moments of fear and uncertainty. For a Christian communicator, the message becomes clear: *we are called to*

report truthfully, educate responsibly, and participate actively in efforts that foster community solidarity. Whether through raising awareness, supporting relief initiatives, or advocating for better disaster-preparedness policies, our role is to help build a society that reflects compassion, responsibility, and genuine concern for one another, especially for those most affected by the storms we face.

Two

LIGHT IN THE SMALL OFFERINGS

Luke 21:1–4 (Monday, November 24, 2025)

Belenismo sa Tarlac 2025 once again transformed the province into a vibrant display of creativity, faith, and community spirit. Known as the "Nativity Scene Capital of the Philippines," the festival brought together families, barangays, schools, and various institutions who dedicated months to crafting their own belen displays. This year's entries not only showcased artistic skill and cultural pride but also carried deeper themes of unity, hope, and shared devotion, reflecting the true meaning of the Christmas story. The festival grounds were filled with bright light installations, local music performances, and enthusiastic visitors who gathered to admire the craftsmanship of the participants. Beyond its aesthetic beauty, the event also stimulated economic activity for local vendors and tourism partners, reinforcing bonds within the community and highlighting how cultural traditions can serve multiple purposes—spiritual, social, and economic.

Image of AFP's Belenismo entry for the 18th Belenismo sa Tarlac.

Yet, beneath the dazzling displays lies the quiet work that often goes unnoticed: the countless hands that meticulously built each belen piece, the volunteers who organized logistics and ensured the smooth running of the festival, and the small communities that contributed whatever resources they could muster. Many participants did not have large budgets or professional equipment, yet they joined Belenismo because it had become a meaningful tradition that reinforced community identity and personal devotion. Stories of barangay artisans creatively reusing old or discarded materials, students staying after class to paint figures, and families preparing food for volunteers show that the festival's success depends not only on grand displays but also on countless small acts of dedication. In this sense, the festival is not merely a competition for the most elaborate belen; it is a collective act of offering where even the smallest contribution helps illuminate the province with joy, unity, and faith.

Reading this celebration through the lens of the Gospel for November 24 provides deeper insight. In Luke 21:1–4, Jesus observes wealthy individuals making large donations to the treasury, yet He focuses on a poor widow who offers two small coins. Despite her offering being the smallest in amount, *it is the greatest in spirit because she gave all she had to live on*. This

moment serves as a profound lesson in sincerity, humility, and the true nature of sacrifice. It shifts our perspective from measuring worth by size, wealth, or visibility to valuing the intention and heart behind an action.

Viewed in this light, Belenismo takes on a richer meaning. While some entries are elaborate and impressive, many come from small, sincere contributions, mirroring the widow's offering. The beauty of the festival lies not solely in extravagance but in the dedication, faith, and love behind each effort. Barangays collecting recycled materials, students painting late into the night, and families sharing their time and resources all reflect a communal spirit grounded in generosity and devotion. Their participation embodies the Gospel's lesson: true giving is not about abundance but about wholehearted sincerity and love for others.

This reading challenges us to notice and appreciate the unseen labor behind communal celebrations. Faith is not demonstrated only through grand achievements but also through quiet, consistent acts of generosity. For Christian communicators, this serves as a reminder to highlight stories that often go overlooked—the small acts of service, the minor contributions, and the everyday efforts that sustain community life. By sharing these stories, we help others see that holiness and goodness are not confined to extraordinary events or displays but are present in the small, sincere actions that reflect God's love in the world. The festival, therefore, is not only a cultural celebration; it is a living testament to how faith, community, and generosity intersect in meaningful, tangible ways.

Three

TOUCHED BY CHRIST

Matthew 2:1–12 (Tuesday, January 6)

The groundbreaking ceremony and canonical erection of Nuestro Padre Jesús Nazareno as a full-fledged parish, together with the installation of its first parish priest, marks a historic and deeply spiritual moment for the community. What was once a developing faith community has now been formally recognized by the Church as a parish, entrusted with the mission of pastoral care, sacramental life, and evangelization. Celebrated on the feast of Nuestro Padre Jesús Nazareno, this event reflects years of devotion, perseverance, and shared faith centered on Christ who bears the Cross and walks with His people in suffering and hope. Beyond the physical beginning of a church structure, the occasion signifies the strengthening of a spiritual home where the faithful are called to grow together in faith and service.

Reading this milestone through the Gospel of Luke 5:12–16 gives the event a deeper meaning. In this passage, a man afflicted with leprosy approaches Jesus with humility and trust, saying, *"Lord, if you will, you can make me clean."* Leprosy in biblical times did not only cause physical suffering but also social exclusion, as those afflicted were separated from the community. Instead of avoiding him, Jesus stretches out His hand and touches the man—an act of compassion that breaks social boundaries. With a simple command, Jesus heals him, restoring not only his health but also his dignity and place in the community.

This Gospel resonates strongly with the devotion to Nuestro Padre Jesús Nazareno and the identity of the newly erected parish. The Nazareno represents Christ who does not turn away from human suffering but enters into it. The parish, born under this devotion, is called

to reflect the same compassionate presence—to be a place where the wounded, the struggling, and the searching can encounter Christ's healing love. Just as the leper approached Jesus with faith, the community itself has journeyed through years of quiet service, prayer, and sacrifice before reaching this moment of recognition as a parish.

Jesus' instruction to the healed man to present himself to the priest also highlights the importance of community and order. Healing leads back into communal life, not isolation. In the same way, the canonical erection of the parish integrates the local faith community more fully into the life of the Church. The installation of a parish priest further emphasizes this call to guide, shepherd, and restore—ensuring that pastoral care reaches every member, especially those on the margins.

Image of the Eucharistic Celebration of the Parish Canonical Erection.

The final verse of the Gospel offers a crucial lesson: despite growing crowds and increasing recognition, Jesus withdraws to the desert to pray. This reminds the parish that while growth, activity, and visibility are important, everything must be rooted in prayer. A parish devoted to Nuestro Padre Jesús Nazareno must remain grounded in humility and constant communion with God, ensuring that service flows from faith and not mere recognition.

Ultimately, Luke 5:12–16 challenges the parish to become Christ's outstretched hand in

the community. As Nuestro Padre Jesús Nazareno begins its life as a parish, it is called to be a place of healing, inclusion, and prayer—where faith is lived through compassion and service. In touching lives with Christ's love, the parish becomes a living sign of hope for all who seek healing and belonging. *Viva Jesús Nazareno!*

Four

LIGHT AMID LOSS

Mark 4:21–25 (Thursday, January 29, 2026)

The discovery of the remains of John Ysmael Mollenido in Barangay Maluid, Victoria, Tarlac on the afternoon of January 29, 2026 cast a heavy shadow over the entire community. Found in a calamansi farm, wrapped in plastic tape and without any identifying documents, the condition of the body immediately suggested violence, concealment, and deep injustice. These details alone are enough to disturb the public conscience, but the tragedy became even more painful upon learning that the victim was the child of a police officer. This reality served as a sobering reminder that no family—regardless of profession, authority, or social standing—is immune to loss and grief. What began as a missing person case ended in sorrow, unanswered questions, and a renewed call for truth, justice, and accountability.

Reading this event through the Gospel of Mark 4:21–25 gives the tragedy a deeper moral and spiritual lens. In this passage, Jesus asks, *"Is a lamp brought in to be put under a basket or under a bed, and not on a lampstand?"* He teaches that light exists to illuminate, not to be hidden, and that what is concealed will eventually be revealed. The Gospel speaks directly about truth, responsibility, and the moral duty to bring things into the open. These themes resonate strongly in the face of a crime that appears to have been deliberately hidden, both physically and symbolically, from public sight.

The manner in which the victim was discovered reflects precisely the act Jesus warns against—the attempt to bury wrongdoing in darkness. The wrapping of the body and the absence of identification suggest an effort to erase identity, suppress truth, and delay justice. Yet the Gospel reassures believers that darkness does not have the final word. Just as a lamp is

meant to shine, truth has a way of emerging despite attempts to conceal it. The discovery of the remains, painful as it is, becomes an act of light breaking through darkness—a necessary step for justice to begin its work and for healing to eventually take place.

Image of Lady Justice.

This Gospel passage also challenges how society responds to tragedies like this. Jesus' words, *"Take care what you hear,"* remind us that receiving difficult news carries responsibility. It calls people not to consume stories of violence with indifference, gossip, or mere curiosity, but with compassion, discernment, and moral awareness. Behind every crime report is a human life, a grieving family, and a community left shaken by fear and uncertainty. The loss of a young life in such circumstances demands not only investigation and accountability, but empathy and respect for human dignity.

For Christian communicators, this moment carries a serious responsibility. Reporting must illuminate truth without exploiting pain or sensationalizing suffering. Communication should honor the dignity of the victim, acknowledge the grief of the family, and amplify calls for justice rather than speculation. The Gospel urges communicators to use their platforms as lampstands—spaces where truth, compassion, and responsibility are upheld, even when the subject matter is difficult and painful.

Ultimately, Mark 4:21–25 reminds us that God desires light, not concealment; truth, not silence. While this tragedy brings deep sorrow and unanswered questions, the Christian

response is to trust that light will overcome darkness. As the community mourns, the Gospel challenges both authorities and citizens to seek truth diligently, protect human dignity, and ensure that justice is not hidden, but brought into the light where accountability, healing, and hope can begin.

Five

MUSIC, PRESENCE, AND THE GIFT OF THE MOMENT

Mark 8:1–10 (Wednesday, February 11, 2026)

The announcement that Filipino rock band Over October will finally perform at Ayala Land's Cresendo in Tarlac City on February 13, 2026 brings excitement to many fans who have long waited for this event. Originally postponed due to inclement weather last November 29, 2025, the show is now set to push through—this time as a free concert for everyone. The band's invitation, playful and heartfelt, even hinted at a pre-Valentine's date vibe, encouraging fans to gather and enjoy an evening of music together. Known for songs like *"Ikot," "Kaakit-akit,"* and *"Ating Dalawa,"* Over October has built a strong following among listeners who resonate with their emotional lyrics and distinct sound. The fact that the concert is open and free makes it even more meaningful, as it allows people from different backgrounds to participate without financial barriers.

Reading this event through Mark 8:1–10 offers a deeper reflection. In this Gospel, Jesus feeds the four thousand who had gathered to listen to Him. The crowd had stayed with Him for days, drawn by His words and presence. Seeing that they were hungry and far from home, Jesus did not send them away empty. Instead, He took the little bread available, gave thanks, broke it, and shared it with the multitude. What seemed insufficient became more than enough when offered with compassion and generosity.

This Gospel highlights two important values: presence and sharing. The crowd in Mark's account gathered not merely for entertainment, but because they desired to be near Jesus.

Their presence showed commitment, and Jesus responded with care. In a different but relatable way, concerts also gather people into a shared space. Music creates connection, unity, and a sense of belonging. It brings strangers together under a common rhythm and shared emotion. The Over October concert, especially being free, mirrors in some small way the spirit of generosity found in the Gospel. What could have been a ticketed and exclusive event becomes instead an open invitation—come, gather, and share this experience.

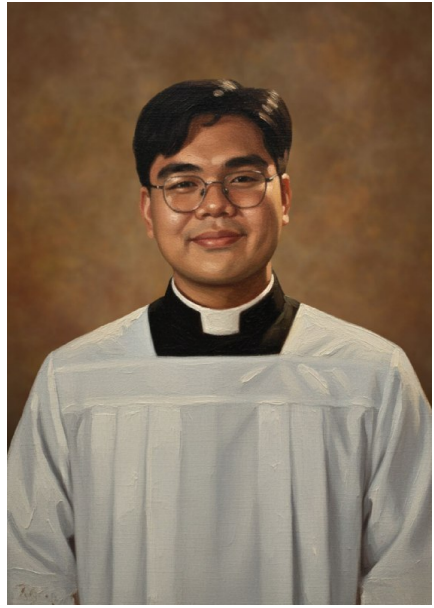
Image of the band Over October.

The Gospel also reminds us that what we offer, even if simple, can nourish others. A concert may not feed physical hunger like the miracle in Mark, but it can nourish emotional and social needs. In a world often marked by stress, routine, and pressure, moments of music and community provide rest and joy. When something is given freely, it reflects generosity and

gratitude. The band's decision to push through with the performance despite previous postponement also shows commitment to their audience, echoing the idea of not sending people away disappointed.

However, the Gospel also calls for balance. After feeding the crowd, Jesus eventually moves on, reminding us that gatherings, no matter how joyful, are temporary. They are moments meant to refresh and strengthen us before we return to daily life. Music and celebration are gifts, but they should lead us toward gratitude and deeper appreciation of community rather than mere excitement.

Ultimately, Mark 8:1–10 invites us to see gatherings not just as events, but as opportunities for shared humanity. The upcoming concert in Tarlac is more than entertainment—it is a moment of connection, generosity, and presence. Like the crowd in the Gospel, people gather seeking something meaningful. And when what is offered is shared freely and received with gratitude, it becomes more than enough.



About the Author

A young seminarian of the *Society of Saint Paul.*

Walking the long road with more questions than certainty. Not deeply immersed in the language of the seminary and religious life.

I write from where I stand: unpolished faith, ordinary days, and a heart learning to trust that grace works even in the unfinished.

I simply follow the quiet pull of God—guiding, waiting, patient.

With the help of **Jesus the Master, Way, Truth, and Life.**